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**The Foibles of Traveling With Gum Stuck  
To The Bottom Of Your Shoes**

**by**

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I wouldn't exactly describe myself as a world traveller---except, perhaps, to those who suffer from the sad delusion that the world consists entirely of the Western United States. Nonetheless, it is my precarious opinion that when selecting a travel companion for a voyage extending beyond the length of a single afternoon, one should restrict the candidate list to one's lover or an individual one hopes to be enemies with for life. Failing at that, travel in large groups. It'll make it more difficult for the police to trace the bullet back to you.

Of course, this is the sort of lesson that one doesn't learn except through the painful tutelage of experience.

And I was the fortunate recipient of such an important lesson, beginning one early Thursday morning in April when I flew out of LAX to the slumbering pueblo of Tucson, Arizona for three days of conferences with the Society of Professional Journalists. My travel companion, Todd Jarrett, was the only other student at Cal State Fullerton, where I am a Communications major, who had the magical combination of time, money and interest to make this trip. Oh yes, he possessed one other important ingredient to make this experience complete. He and I were total strangers.

## **Traveling With Gum Stuck To The Bottom of Your Shoes - 2**

The situation was ripe for the arbitrary educational arm of experience.

And it really doesn't take much to get the lessons rolling. In our case this was all done before we even stepped off the plane in Tucson. It was simply a matter of missing the first available bus to the airport, getting on a flight that got delayed over an hour due to an "unbalanced load in the baggage compartment," and arriving in the middle of a downpour for a conference entitled, "A Place in the Sun."

The important thing to remember about traveling with someone is that it is an accelerated case of being thrown together by the circumstances of life. It's a kind of cosmic orange juice squeezer. What may take years to experience back at home tends to happen in the first 24 hours when on the road.

And how one and one's travel companion adjust to the rigors of this experience is the difference between becoming life-long friends and spending several hours going through the local phone book in search of a hired assassin. In the case of Jarrett and myself, I must regretfully announce that I will not be naming any of my children after him.

Remember the recent John Hughes film, "Planes, Trains, and Automobiles"? I think they based the character John Candy played on Jarrett.

Actually, Jarrett is a nice enough guy, just the kind of guy to have a beer and watch a ball game with. It's just that he, like Candy's character, was one of these guys who never really

### **Traveling With Gum Stuck To The Bottom of Your Shoes - 3**

learned to put a lid on it. I mean, from the time we settled in our bus seats Thursday morning until he disappeared in the darkness the following Sunday night he showered me with endless banter about his comic book conventions, Star Trek esoterica, network marketing (the latest Amway euphemism) and a detailed appraisal of the girls at the Titan news room.

I mean, I know that he was just trying to be a pal, but I had more privacy when I was married. At least my ex-wife knew better than to try to carry on a conversation with me when I was trying to read a book.

It actually got to the point that when I got up to go to the bathroom he'd ask me where I was going. And if that wasn't enough he'd ask why?

By Saturday night the build-up of my unspoken "appreciation" for his unending stream of tacit observations required that I spend the evening at a Tucson hangout called the Javelina Cantina, numbing my few still-functioning brain cells, dancing with equally intellectual co-eds, and participating in general forgetfulness.

Having accomplished the first of these three requirements I told Jarrett (now, you didn't think that I'd leave the poor man up in the hotel room by himself, did you?) that I saw a co-ed who looked sufficiently bored and ready to dance.

I weaved my way through the crowd and asked the cute brunette if she wanted to dance. She made a little face and said no. Okay, exit, stage left. I turned to make my hasty

#### **Traveling With Gum Stuck To The Bottom of Your Shoes - 4**

retreat but ran straight into Jarrett who had evidently followed me across the bar.

Being turned down for a dance was disappointing enough, doing it with an unsolicited entourage gave the experience just the right Keystone Cop touch that it had always been missing. It was like getting caught going the wrong way on a one way street.

It suddenly occurred to me that living with Jarrett was like stepping on a piece of chewing gum in a hot asphalt parking lot. No matter how hard I scrapped and scuffed I had the terrifying suspicion that he'd still be stuck to the bottom of my shoe for the rest of my life.

Toward the end of the trip Jarrett said that he was definitely going to the national SPJ conference in November. I smiled a suffering smile at the thought. If they force me to go I will definitely travel in a large group.

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